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High-Altitude U.S. Flights Over Red China Reported

By RICHARD WITKIN

High-altitude RB-57 reconnaissance planes with several advantages over the U-2 are reported to have been flying missions over Communist China for some time. The

Department of Defense denies the report. However, informed sources say various models of the RB-57 have been collecting data on Communist Chinese military and industrial capabilities for several years.

It is believed that the latest model, the RB-57F, is among the planes that have performed the reconnaissance. The Defense Department says the earlier model, the D version, is so old it has been grounded.

The initials RB stand for reconnaissance bomber. The RB-57's have better over-all performance than the U-2's. But they are far inferior to the A-11, the 2,000-mile-an-hour craft disclosed by President Johnson Feb. 29.

It is reported that RB-57 missions have been flown by both Nationalist Chinese and American pilots.

Complaints by Peking

The Peking Government complained about RB-57 "incursions" over the Chinese mainland as long ago as the fall of 1962.

It specifically mentioned the A and D models.

The latest and most exotic looking of the reconnaissance craft is the F model. It not only has wings almost twice as large as those on the original B-57, but also two small engines outboard of the two main engines.

The RB-57F became publicly known last fall when it was seen at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif.

The Air Force released some details on the plane's dimensions and engines, but it has refused to release pictures.

The latest version of the plane is reported to have a range of more than 5,000 miles, compared with about 4,000 miles for the U-2.

It also can carry a larger load of photographic and electronic equipment.

A-11 Far Superior

But perhaps most important are the two main engines, if one flames out the plane will not drop rapidly toward altitudes where enemy fighters or anti-aircraft can bring it down.

The U-2 has only one engine. There have been reports that it was the flaming out of the engine on the U-2 flown by Francis Gary Powers that forced him to an altitude where Soviet defense forces were able to shoot him down.

However, the U-2 apparently has one advantage over the RB-57. Its maximum altitude is reported to be considerably higher.

Neither plane is in the same league as the A-11, which was originally designed for high-altitude reconnaissance work. President Johnson said its altitude was more than 70,000 feet, which is also the imprecise official word on the U-2.

However, it has been reliably reported that the A-11 was designed for flight at about 120,000 feet, whereas the U-2's top

altitude has been variously reported at between 90,000 and 100,000 feet.

The basic B-57 aircraft originally was designed and built in Britain and was called the Canberra.

Drastic changes have been made to give it the performance for effective reconnaissance work.

The wing span has been increased several times from the original 63 feet to the F model's 122 feet. Extra span is needed to support a plane in the rarefied air of extreme altitudes.

The thrust of each of the two main engines has been increased from the 10,000 pounds of the original jets to well over 17,000 pounds for the main Pratt & Whitney TF-33 turbo-fan units in the RB-57F. The Pratt and Whitney J-60's that have been added for the F version have a thrust of more than 3,000 pounds each.

A turbo-fan is basically a jet, but it has several extra large compressors. The blades of these whirling compressors not only thrust air to the rear into the regular combustion chamber, but also send large amounts of extra air around the outside of the combustion chamber.

In this latter job, they contribute propulsive force much as a conventional airplane propeller does.

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THAT HIGH-ROLLING A-11

As noted in detail in yesterday's NEWS by Military Editor Jerry Greene, the trade magazine Aviation Week and Space Technology says that our new 2,000-m.p.h. A-11 jet interceptor plane has already flown reconnaissance missions over Communist territory and has proved its "ability to outfly any air defense system now in operational use."

Keep 'Em Guessing U. S. Government sources deny the report of the reconnaissance missions over Red territory.

We hope both reports are true, and that the A-11 will continue such missions and bring home even better photographs of enemy terrain than did the U-2.

Our current leaders would be smart to deny such reports, thereby keeping the enemy guessing. Let's hope they will continue to be far shrewder about the A-11 than the Eisenhower Administration was about the U-2.